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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2058
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000757

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/SPG
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2016

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SUBJECT: WEST DARFUR: SECURITY, HUMANITARIAN RELIEF, AND AMIS

REF: A. KHARTOUM 722

¶B. KHARTOUM 67 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. ANDREW STEINFELD; REASON: 1.4(B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Charge Steinfeld traveled to El Geneina, capital of West Darfur, on March 20-21 to assess the local security and humanitarian situation. Several NGOs have scaled down operations in the state after a recent surge in banditry and armed robbery. Though much of the violence is directed at foreign aid workers, it also continues to affect the local population, especially women. AMIS and UN assessments of the violence differ sharply, however, with AMIS describing the situation as "relatively calm." But while both AMIS and the UN agree AMIS needs better logistics and communications, some aid workers argue AMIS also needs something more -- motivation. END SUMMARY.

No Improvement on Security; NGOs Curtailing Operations

¶2. (C) Humanitarian relief operations in West Darfur have been sharply curtailed in the last six months following a surge in banditry and armed robbery, though conditions may have stabilized recently, UN and NGO representatives told Charge Steinfeld during a visit to El Geneina on March 20-21.

There has been little or no access to the northern half of the state, including Sirba, Saleia, Kulbus, and Kerenek districts, since late 2005, though helicopter flights have been maintained to Kerenek, and limited helicopter flights resumed in early March to Sirba, Saleia, and Kulbus. The UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) still considers the entire area "Phase IV," or suspension of non-essential operations. Conditions in the southern half of West Darfur are slightly better, with "Phase III" operations in El Geneina, Mornei, Habillah, and Khor Banga (Foroburunga) districts, though armed robberies remain common. However, UNDSS recently moved to Phase IV operations in the area southwest of El Geneina along the Chadian border, including Masteri and Beida Districts; there have been no helicopter flights to the area since early February.

¶3. (C) Several international NGOs have withdrawn from West Darfur as result of these conditions, according to UN OCHA's West Darfur Area Coordinator, Andy Pendleton. Warchild/Canada and International Medical Corps (IMC) suspended all programming in the state after the UN moved to Phase IV in December 2005, though IMC has recently sent a few medical teams back into the area. Triangle Generation Humanitaire (TGF) closed its operations after a series of armed robberies on its facilities in El Geneina; ADRA USA stopped its activities after bandits attacked one of its convoys on the El Geneina-Zalingei road and abducted its

staff. A Save the Children/U.S. vehicle was attacked near El Geneina on March 17, but the driver managed to outrun the attackers, and the group's local director currently has no plans to leave. In all, said Pendleton, there have been 72 armed attacks on UN or NGO activities in West Darfur since mid-October 2005. "It's just a matter of time before someone is killed," Pendleton said.

IDPs/GBV: AMIS Reports Progress, but Others Disagree

¶ 14. (C) Though attacks on aid workers have increased in the past six months, violence against the local population has declined, officials at African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) Sector 3 HQ (El Geneina) told the Charge. According to AMIS, the security situation has been "relatively calm," with some "harassment" of locals by Arabs, along with "cattle rustling" along the border, and isolated cases of rape -- only six in the entire month of February. (AMIS could not say how many cases of rape had occurred in January, or in previous months.)

¶ 15. (C) OCHA's Pendleton, however, sharply disputed this figure, and questioned AMIS' assessment of the overall security situation: "They told you that?" he asked incredulously. Though Pendleton admitted that gender-based violence (GBV) was "no where near" 2003-4 levels, it was still high. "We hit a plateau sometime around late October 2005, and things have yet to really come down." NGO staff agreed, telling the Charge that there had been "no decrease at all" in rape cases since October, and "no real improvement" despite official government pledges to investigate and prosecute offenders. "It's all part of the general deterioration of things in West Darfur," one aid worker noted.

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¶ 16. (C) AMIS Sector 3 HQ currently organizes firewood patrols at Arda Mata IDP camp near El Geneina, and two others in the area. However, AMIS officials say IDPs do not always want AMIS protection. "We've had several meetings with them to try to set up times for patrols. The first time we ran a patrol, no women showed up. Now we do it only when they request it in advance -- usually one or two times a week," AMIS CIVPOL commander told the Charge. Moreover, according to AMIS, they do not have enough personnel to offer firewood patrols at every camp, or even every week. "We can only send out two each day, including ceasefire investigation patrols, NGO escort patrols, route clearance patrols, and generally confidence building patrols. Firewood patrols are extra."

AMIS Falls Short on Logistics, Motivation

¶ 17. (C) But AMIS officials are quick to admit that manpower is not their only shortfall. "We have many logistical and communications problems -- not enough vehicles, no base stations, and unreliable satellite and cell phone networks," the Deputy Sector Commander told the Charge. In fact, AMIS' logistical and organizational shortcomings became painfully obvious while escorting the Charge on a short trip from the AMIS Sector 3 HQ to UN offices in El Geneina: one vehicle had a flat tire, another had not been refueled in advance, the radio in the Charge's vehicle malfunctioned, and not all the drivers knew the route.

¶ 18. (C) According to NGO staff in El Geneina, AMIS' real problem is not logistics, but motivation. "They could do more with the mandate they have," the CARE representative told the Charge. "They need to actively seek to protect civilians, not just follow up on incidents that happened weeks ago." Though all NGO staff acknowledged that AMIS had made a difference in West Darfur, they noted that its effectiveness seemed to vary from sector to sector, depending on the sector commander and nationality of the troops. As

AMIS, Sector 3 Commander -- a Nigerian -- told the Charge quite plainly, "I'm not here to go out and fight anyone."

Comment: AMIS' Role in West Darfur

19. (C) West Darfur remains dangerous for both aid workers and the local population alike, though conditions at this point do not seem to be getting worse. But while attacks on NGO staff have been well documented over the past six months, no one really knows how many IDPs have been raped, beaten, or killed. More disturbing still is the wide gap between UN and NGO assessments on one side, and AMIS and Government assessments on the other (Ref A). Though AMIS clearly remains an important force for stability in West Darfur, for now at least, its effectiveness remains limited.

"Re-hatting" AMIS is a separate issue. Most NGO and UN personnel said they would welcome more robust international presence. However, given the Government's (NCP) negative attitude towards the deployment of UN peace enforcers, one UNHCR official wondered aloud what repercussions for international aid workers might follow if UN troops were deployed against the Government's wishes.

STEINFELD